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ABSTRACT

Child care programs are ideal places to begin the mastery of both English and a native language. Language growth can be promoted through the use of pretend play. Pretend situations include storytelling, oral drills and poems, riddles and songs. In storytelling activities, it is essential that the adult model language for the children. The children listen very intently to pronunciation, intonation, pitch, stress, rhythm, and tone. Using oral substitution drills with pretend play, the teacher can select nouns, verbs, or adjectives from the native language which can be substituted for English equivalents. Youngsters enjoy going through these drills especially if the teacher varies them. In pretend play, children can assume roles of characters or objects from stories, poems or riddles which they have heard. Oral language techniques such as (a) selective visual attention or questioning, (b) attention to nonvisual stimuli, (c) recall, (d) directed dialogue, and (e) self-monitoring can be used in pretend play. These techniques can all be used in different classroom activities such as storytelling, oral drills and poems, riddles and songs. It is the teacher's responsibility to provide opportunities for children to hear, experience and use their language(s). (Author/RH)

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LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH PRETEND PLAY IN YOUNG BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL CHILDREN

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Language Learning Through Pretend Play

in Young Bilingual-Bicultural Children

> "Buenos días, Enrique! Cómo estaś? asks Mrs. Jackson as she meets Enrique at the school door. She is saying "Good morning!" and asking "How are you?" Enrique's face lights up as he very enthusiastically responds, !Bien maestra! (Fine teacher!) and he follows her into the center.

Mrs. Jackson's greeting to Enrique in Spanish brings about a real awareness of the fact that educators today face a real challenge in meeting the educational needs of the bilingual child who may also speak Greek, French, Italian or another native language. Her greeting and use of Spanish in the classroom helps the monolingual native-speaking child, the monolingual English-speaking child, the predominant English and predominantly native speaking child.

The bilingual-bicultural child comes to school with a distinct language, value system, culture, life-style and a defined set of intellectual and social-emotional skills. In the processes of learning to speak, the child often feels alienated, afraid and inhibited. Leaving the familiarity and security of home and family to enter the strange and frightening child care center can lead the child into stressful and confusing situations. By using the native language in a planned manner, adults working with young children: (a) foster a positive identity within a culture; (b) develop feelings of self-assurance and confidence in the school setting; and, (c) promote positive feelings and attitudes toward native languages. All are basic to learning success.

Historically, the role of formal schooling was to socialize the culturally and linguistically different child. This acculturation process would, with all possible expediency, move the child into the mainstream middle class society. The acculturation process excluded the child's language, culture, and heritage

in the belief that it was the best way to "Americanize" him. Children were prohibited from speaking native languages on the playgrounds and in the classrooms. The child was made to feel inferior, ashamed, unaccepted. In the traditional schools, bilingualism was treated as a problem and handicap. In turn, these children were treated as "slow", "retarded", "unmotivated", "dull", and became candidates for special classes. With this type of treatment, bilingual-children developed negative feelings toward self, school, and community.

Currently, however, bilingual-bicultural education is becoming more important to the school's program. It responds to the philosophy of cultural pluralism. It focuses on instruction in two languages-one of which is English-with the recognition and integration of the child's culture. Basically, the child listens, speaks, and in a formal school setting, reads and writes in English and possibly becomes literate in the native language as well.

Child care programs are ideal places to begin the mastery of English and a native language. In the center, learning and growth of the children flourish as the teacher: (a) accepts their individuality and uniqueness; (b) respects their culture, language, values, and beliefs; (c) demonstrates a sensitivity and understanding of their feelings and emotions; (d) utilizes what they bring into the classrrom to enrich the instructional program; and, (e) helps them to develop a sense of pride and dignity toward their culture as well as respect and appreciation for other cultures.

The adult working with bilingual-bicultural children remembers that the native language which children bring to the school are precious possessions which helps them to communicate, to receive input, to process, to store and to retrive concepts, information, and knowledge. Language is the means through which the child copes with the environment and makes sense of the world around him. It is the child's identity. If teachers accept the child's language, they accept the child: language is truly personal and individualistic and has a sense of "self".

In child care settings, pretend play can be used quite easily to promote language growth of young bilingual-bicultural children. Pretend play requires children to change themselves into other people, objects, and situations as shown through their verbal and/or motor enactments of the role. Play is a natural and spontaneous activity that occurs in all young children and can be found in all child care programs. It is a sound vehicle to use in enhancing and fostering language growth and learning. Play is a rich reservoir that can be tapped to serve bilingual-bicultural programs in child care. Spontaneous play of young children is linked with language growth and learning. From language perspectives, spontaneous play helps children tell and retell parts of the episode in speaking. Pretend play provides real life situations for children to model language, solve, and relate programs, and thereby help them understand themselves as individuals and members of social groups.

Providing additional enriched experiences can in turn be used by the children as context sources for their play. At the conclusion of the children's play, the language used and ideas expressed by them in their play can be used as grist for effective and informal instruction in bilingual-bicultural programs. Thus, the adult's approach is twofold: First, increase the number of pretend play experiences to generate language. Second, use the child's own personal language generated in pretend play as grist for bilingual programming.

Pretend Play as a Base for Oral Language Instruction

Teachers can develop pretend play situations which they can use to promote language learning. These situations include: (a) storytelling; (b) oral drills; and, (c) poems, riddles, songs.

Storytelling as a situation for developing oral language is a very natural medium. Children enjoy listening and re-enacting stories, especially those that are action-filled, colorful, imaginative, and descriptive. Children love stories

where they portray animals such as the "sly fox," "the big wolf," "the hungry bear," or the "silly monkey." These are human-like characters who can actually speak, laugh, cry, and run. "The Three Bears" is a fine example of a story with universal appeal for children of all ages. This story serves as an excellent model for enhancing language growth, because it elicits speech from children in a very natural and relaxed manner. Children respond quite eagerly to questions about the characters. Teachers can develop many interesting learning activities centered around the story. They first read the selection in the child's native language once or twice and then in English. Depending on the child's individual needs, the adult can structure language activities which respond to those needs. The bilingual child gains a real sense of security and personal identification while he listens to the native language version, because this is something which he remembers from home, from mother, from father, from brothers, and sisters. As the youngster hears the story, it is essential that the adult models language for the children. The children listen very intently to pronunciation, intonation, pitch, stress, rhythm, and tone. They are learning by imitating the adult. Language activities which may be used in the classroom include: (a) telling familiar or original stories in English or native language depending on student needs; (b) role-playing in both languages with or without the use of props; (c) oral drills, for example, repetition, substitution, replacement, and conversion; (d) using tape recordings of children telling their own stories and playing them back; and, (e) having the children work on individual art projects to depict events in a story and having them share these with others.

Oral drills can be used quite effectively in the classroom through pretend play with key vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammatical structures which the teacher presents. The adult must remember that drills can also become mono-

tonous, so that it is important to be a careful and creative planner. For instance, through pretend play, the teacher introduces key words to the children who, in assuming different roles such as fireman or policeman, learn relevant vocabulary words associated with that role. Repetition drills are used with pretend play to teach sounds and words. As the teacher says each word, she should enunciate with clarity to provide accurate and concise models for the children. Oral drills can be very exciting and stimulating when the teacher uses a variety of techniques which serves as a challenge! For example, oral drills on words ladder, pump, hose, or uniform can be used. These words which may be expanded into phrases and sentences can be practiced through oral drills in two languages.

Using substitution drills with pretend play, the teacher can select nouns, verbs, or adjectives from the native language which can be substituted for English nouns, verbs, or adjectives. For example: the child who pretends to be a teacher can practice substituting "maestra" for "teacher." The youngsters enjoy going through these drills especially if the teacher varies them.

Using replacement drills with pretend play, the teacher asks the students to replace a word with another of a different grammatical form that expresses the same idea. For example, the teacher says to the children "When I say the car is black, you say-"It's black!" Also, for example, children who pretend to ride in a red fire truck can be asked, "Is the fire truck red?" With this and similar questions, the teacher can assist the children with their responses.

Poems, games, rhymes, and riddles can also be used as pretend play tools for language growth. In pretend play, children assume roles of characters or objects from stories, poems, or riddles which they have heard. Accordingly, the children pretend to be a "silly clown," "a ballerina," "a fiery dragon" or "a superman!" These tools can be used to teach concepts as number skills, letters, and sounds, directions, space, shape, size, color, texture, and many other con-

cepts. Introducing such concepts in two languages can be fun and exciting. In teaching the "colors", for example, the teacher can use the following game to each color recognition, word recognition, and reinforce listening skills. The youngsters use the information on color in pretend play.

THE COLORS: LOS COLORES

COLORS (English)	COLORES (Spanish)
There are colors and colors	Hay colores y colores
There are colors, colors, colors	Hay colores, colores, colores
(Repeat)	(Repita)
Now we are going to play a game	Ahora vamos a jugar un juego
of colors, of colors	de colores, de colores.
(Repeat)	(Repita)
Stand when you hear your color	Se paran cuando oigan su color
Ready! Ready!	!Listos! !Listos!
(Repeat)	(Repita)
Negro.....Black	Azul.....Blue
Blanco.....White	Rojo.....Red
Verde.....Green	Amarillo.....Yellow

This song is appealing to children, because it is fun to role-play, and in addition it serves to strengthen communication skills for English-speaking and native language speaking children.

Other Oral Language Techniques:

Extensions of Pretend Play

There are several other important oral language techniques that can be used to serve pretend play. These oral language techniques can be used to enrich role play and, at the same time, extend oral language growth in young children. The oral language techniques are: (a) selective visual attention or questioning; (b) attention to nonvisual stimuli; (c) recall; (d) directed dialogue; and, (e) self-monitoring.

The technique of questioning involves the teacher providing a number of objects of varying types and spreading them out on the table or floor. These

procedures insure a quantity of objects that can provide depth to role playing, the opportunity to choose the right objects for the role; and, allows the child to see the many objects at a glance. The child pretends to be a certain person, object, or situation and is asked by the teacher to select an object from the table or floor which pertains to the role chosen. The teacher may then ask the child questions about the object selected.

Questioning children about the objects as they search through the array to select those that can be used prior to the actual role play episode, assists language growth in guiding perception.

Questioning about objects also aids role play in that it focuses children's attention on a number of materials from which to choose.

Examples: The Three Bears

(a) verbal labeling: The teacher says "Show me baby bear's spoon."

(b) verbal labeling by function or attribute: "Show me or point to the object that you would pour your soup into."

(c) Perceptual matching: Holding up a picture of a chair, the teacher says "Find one that looks like this."

(d) Perceptual memory: Holding up a toy bear, placing it behind the adults back, and asking "Find a toy exactly like the one I showed you!"

The second technique to aid oral language and facilitate role play is called attention to nonvisual stimuli. This technique means assisting children to develop and use their facility with nonvisual stimuli. Here, senses other than seeing, such as hearing, smelling, tasting, and moving assists language and role taking. For instance, a child who feels the texture of objects and learns that it is rough, smooth, or bumpy may not be aware of those characteristics simply by looking at them. By gaining facility in the use of modalities other than the visual, children develop and enrich their language and role play. Emphasizing facility in nonvisual areas requires the child to describe objects and

materials on the basis of nonvisual characteristics. Since seeing is the major modality that children and adults use, relying heavily on the visual modality to gather information about objects and materials is natural. In using this technique and increasing the facility of other modalities, the use of competing visual cues are eliminated. For example, the teacher says, "Let's pretend that you are a wise owl. Place your hands behind your back and I will put an object in your hands. Then, describe the object!" The children can easily learn new linguistic structures through this technique in two languages.

The development of memory is the third language technique that can be used to serve pretend play and extend oral language. Since ideas need to be retrieved when needed, memory or recall is an important facet of language, intellectual growth, and role taking. By developing memory, the children can be questioned about materials and processes that were experienced in role play. In developing memory, the teacher gives no hints that memory demands will occur. This technique is used after children have experienced particular situations and the cues are temporarily removed and out of sight. The teacher asks questions to determine whether the youngsters have retained content from these experiences. Examples of the memory technique follow:

(a) The teacher asks the child to pretend that he or she is the lost puppy in yesterday's story. The children then describe what happened to the puppy in the story and how the puppy felt when it was lost. . . and then when it was found.

(b) The teacher asks the child to pretend that they are at the zoo which they visited last week. They tell about the things they remember about the trip.

Directed dialogue is the fourth technique that can be used to assist oral language growth through pretend play. It requires the child to use oral language

to describe an event or situation that is about to occur or has happened. To get children to construct verbal formulations that are relevant descriptions of reality, the teacher can: (a) ask them questions that are based on experiences; and, (b) have them define a course of action for someone else to perform. Using experiences and following through with courses of action are bases for directed dialogue that are used to develop oral language facility and role play. Children can be encouraged to share experiences from home using their native language. Using experiences that are already learned provides security and gives the child the opportunity to assume the power role and at the same time permits practice in oral language. For instance, the child may role play mother or father at home. The child says, "You have finished playing. Can you show me where your toys go?"

Children enjoy the opportunity of assuming the power role, because this encourages them to become more responsive, eager, motivated and more enthusiastic in the classroom environment. It gives them a feeling of belonging, of being important, and of being accepted.

The last technique is called <u>self-monitoring of verbal responses</u>. This technique asks the child to make a response to situations whose truth or falsity can be determined. When the children make the response, they are asked to show "why" the response is correct. The child can be asked to show and explain the response whether or not it is correct. Asking children to explain answers that are correct as well as incorrect enriches oral language and gives them a handle to test out the appropriateness of their responses. Questioning correct as well as incorrect responses is a sound procedure, because the youngster learns that the question is not a signal that he/she is wrong. For example, in a pretend situation, the child is playing with several cars and trucks on the table. The teacher asks, "How many cars are on the table?" The child answers, "Four" and he or she is asked to "count them to show that you are correct."

These techniques can all be used in different classroom activities for example, in songs, riddles, oral language drills, and storytelling. Each of the five techniques, for example, can be used in dramatic play to enhance language skills. These techniques serve communication. The children use relevant language to describe, analyze, and retain information about the environment around them.

Because the use of symbolic language for communication and expression is the most essential skill learned in school, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide the children with as many opportunities as possible for them to: (a) hear the language; (b) have first hand experiences with it; and, (c) use it to express ideas and thoughts. The nurturant and supportive teacher is able to stimulate inquiring minds in an atmosphere that is relaxed, positive, and accepting. The bilingual-bicultural child gains a sense of self-confidence, self esteem, and self-worth, because his language enables him to achieve and to succeed in all areas of the curriculum where language use and comprehension are so vital.

Realizing that the child's language and culture contributes immensely to how he perceives his teachers, his peers, the school, and more importantly to how he perceives himself is the key that unlocks the door to an exciting world of learning. Going to school and participating in what goes on in the classroom becomes a challenge to the child, and he looks forward to it with eagerness. The youngsters enjoy being a real part of the school and of the classroom. Experiencing success and feeling important influence the child's feelings and attitudes in a most positive and healthy way. School will be a fun place where the child will want to be!